

Michigan Dentists, Dental Hygienists, Public Health Officials, Education Leaders Urge Passage of HB 5241 to Improve Oral Health of Kids Entering Kindergarten

Bi-Partisan Legislation Seeks to Help Kids Succeed in the Classroom

LANSING, Mich.—Dentists, dental hygienists, public health officials, children's health and education leaders today urged the Legislature to pass a bipartisan bill aimed at improving the ability of Michigan children to succeed in the classroom by treating dental issues that are often painful, affect learning and cause kids to miss school.

Under HB 5241, all children starting kindergarten in Michigan would have a dental screening, in addition to the hearing and vision screenings that have been required for many decades. The bill is sponsored by 25 Republican and Democrat lawmakers and supported by a broad coalition of dentists, public health leaders, children's health advocates, and public education organizations.

State lawmakers and supporters announced the legislation today at a news conference at Fairview STEM Magnet School in Lansing.

"Oral health and a child's success in school are connected," said state Rep. Scott VanSingel, R-Grant, lead sponsor of HB 5241. "Children nationwide miss 51 million hours of school per year due to oral health issues – many of which are preventable. HB 5241 can improve the ability of children to learn and succeed in school."

While many children starting kindergarten in Michigan already have regular dental care, some children – especially those living in poverty – do not. VanSingel noted that in some areas of the state, as few as 25 percent of children have seen a dentist in the past year. In Detroit, the prevalence of dental disease in children is about 42 percent.

"For decades, children entering kindergarten in Michigan have received vision and hearing screenings to identify health issues that could impede learning," said Anne Scott, executive director of Ingham Community Health Centers and deputy health officer for the Ingham County Health Department. "Those are preventative, proactive public policy measures that help to maximize a child's ability to learn. A dental screening would have the same intent and affect."

Grand Rapids dentist Dr. Debra Peters, president of the Michigan Dental Association, noted that tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease in the United States (five times more common than asthma). About 37 percent of children ages 6 to 9 have dental caries, but the number almost doubles, to 69 percent, for children living in poverty.

MORE



"Nearly half of all children entering kindergarten have had a least one cavity, and 50 percent of first graders have dental decay," Peters said. "A dental screening will help to identify oral health problems that can affect learning in at-risk children who are not accessing dental care before they start school."

Jan Miller, RDH, president of the Michigan Dental Hygienists' Association, said passage of HB 5241 would create a "common sense program and policy" that will improve the health status of thousands of Michigan children and their readiness for classroom success.

"Dental hygienists are proud to stand with dentists, public health leaders, public education leaders and a remarkable bipartisan group of state lawmakers to urge passage of a common sense program and policy that will benefit thousands of Michigan children for generations to come," Miller said.

Under HB 5241, dental hygienists or dentists would provide dental screenings to an estimated 20,000 to 40,000 new kindergarten students in Michigan each year who do not have dental insurance. The program would be managed by the state Department of Health and Human Services and local public health agencies.

The House Fiscal Agency estimates annual costs for screening all eligible children at \$1.6 million to \$1.8 million. The funds would cover each screening, plus staff and program management at the state and county health departments. Assessments for most children on Medicaid will be covered by the state's Healthy Kids Dental program, which covers nearly 1 million low-income children in all 83 counties.

In addition to strong bipartisan support in the Legislature, HB 5241 is supported by Delta Dental of Michigan, the Michigan Dental Association, Michigan Oral Health Coalition (with more than 120 members across the state), Michigan Dental Hygienists' Association, Michigan Primary Care Association, Michigan Association for Local Public Health, My Community Dental Centers, and the Michigan Elementary and Middle School Principals Association. Some other organizations are in the process of finalizing their support with their boards and members.

A hearing on the bill is scheduled for 9 a.m. Wednesday, May 16 in the House Health Policy Committee in Room 519 of the House Office Building.



Please Vote **YES** on House Bill 5241



Because oral health and a child's success in school are connected

Sponsored by 25 Republicans and Democrats, HB 5241 is aimed at improving the ability of Michigan children to succeed in the classroom by treating dental health issues that are often painful, affect learning and cause kids to miss school.

- ▶ Under HB 5241, all children starting kindergarten in Michigan would have a dental assessment, in addition to the hearing and vision screenings that have been required for many decades.

HB 5241 will help more children, especially those living in poverty, receive the dental care they need.

- ▶ HB 5241 would provide dental screenings to the 20,000 to 40,000 new kindergarten students in Michigan each year who do not have dental insurance. The program would be managed by the state Department of Health and Human Services and local public health agencies.
- ▶ The House Fiscal Agency estimates annual costs for screening all eligible uninsured children at \$1.6 million to \$1.8 million. (The funds would cover each screening, plus staff and program management at the state and county health departments.)
- ▶ Assessments for most children on Medicaid will be covered by the state's Healthy Kids Dental program, which covers nearly 1 million low-income children in all 83 counties.

Large numbers of children entering school have oral health issues, including caries (cavities) and other problems that can impede learning, cause pain and cause kids to miss school.

- ▶ Nearly half of all children entering kindergarten have had a least one cavity, and 50 percent of first-graders have dental decay.
- ▶ In some areas of Michigan, as few as 25 percent of children have seen a dentist in the past year.
- ▶ Children miss 51 million hours of school per year due to oral health issues—many of which are preventable.
- ▶ Tooth decay is the #1 most common chronic childhood disease in the U.S. (five times more common than asthma).
- ▶ About 37 percent of children ages 6 to 9 have dental caries, but the number almost doubles, to 69 percent, for children living in poverty.
- ▶ About 14 percent of children overall have caries that are untreated, but the numbers exceed 30 percent in at-risk minority populations.
- ▶ The rate of tooth decay among Hispanic and African-American children ages 2 to 8 is twice that of non-Hispanic white children (2011-12 Pew Report).
- ▶ Multiple studies have found that children with dental pain are significantly more likely to sleep poorly and miss school, and are less likely to complete all of their required homework.
- ▶ Kids who have experienced recent oral health pain are four times more likely to have low grade-point-averages than their counterparts who have not.

